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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to document the progress of students who entered Napa Valley College (NVC) in fall 1984 with the educational objective of earning a degree or certificate. Persistence rates, changes in enrollment status, grades, and withdrawal patterns of 2,319 first-time college students were monitored from fall 1984 to spring 1986. Study findings included the following: (1) 42% of the original sample group were still enrolled in spring 1985, and 24% were still enrolled in spring 1986; (2) semester-to-semester persistence rates tended to be higher among day students than evening students; (3) 36% of the students persisting at NVC in spring 1985 changed their enrollment status from full- to part-time; (4) among students who did not re-enroll in spring 1985, 55% received all F's, W's, and/or No Credit grades in fall 1984, an additional 22% received a mixture of passing and unsatisfactory grades, and the remaining 22% failed and/or withdrew from one or more of their courses in fall 1984 and then withdrew from all classes in spring 1985; (5) the decision of students to withdraw from college took place during the first and, to a lesser extent, second semester, in which they were enrolled; and (6) students who received unsatisfactory grades in one term were likely to receive unsatisfactory grades in subsequent semesters. (EJV)

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THE CLASS OF 1984 RESEARCH PROJECT

Napa Valley College

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Dr. Jack Friedlander
Assistant to the President
Planning and Resource Development

May, 1986

Napa Valley College

Napa, California, 94558

Planning and Resource Development

MEMO TO: All Faculty and Staff
FROM: Jack Friedlander *J.F.*
DATE: May 9, 1986
SUBJECT: The Class of 1984 Research Project

Last year Dr. Feddersen asked me to establish a system to monitor the progress of students who entered the college in the 1984 Fall Semester. This report documents the progress of these first-time students from Fall Semester, 1984, to Spring Semester, 1986.

The results of a survey designed to identify the reasons why a sample of these first-time students decided to withdraw from the college before completing their educational objectives will be discussed in a separate report.

JF:mm

THE CLASS OF 1984 RESEARCH PROJECT

What happens to students who enter Napa Valley College with the educational objective of earning a degree or certificate? We know that in any given year between 400 and 420 of our students earn an associate degree or a certificate of completion, and just over one-half of these individuals continue their studies at a four-year college or university in the following year. We also know from our follow-up studies of former students that most of the college's graduates either obtain good paying jobs in fields related to their training or they achieve grade point averages at the universities they transferred to that are at least equal to those of their counterparts who began their studies at the four-year institutions. What we don't know is what happens to the vast majority of our students who do not receive a degree, certificate of completion, or an invitation to continue their studies at a four-year college or university.

SAMPLE

The sample for this study consisted of 2,319 first-time college students who entered Napa Valley College in the 1984 Fall Semester with five or fewer units of college credit. Individuals entering college with five or fewer credits were considered first-time students so as not to exclude those who had completed an advanced placement course or a summer school course prior to the 1984 Fall Semester.

RESULTS

The information presented in Table 1 shows the college retention statistics for full-time and part-time students from semester to semester from Fall 1984 to Spring 1986. For example, we now know that of all the students who entered Napa Valley College in Fall 1984, 42 percent of them were enrolled in Spring 1985, 26 percent persisted to Fall 1985, and 24 percent were still enrolled in Spring 1986.

TABLE 1

College Persistence Rates of Students
Who Entered Napa Valley College
for the First Time in Fall 1984

Students Entering Napa Valley College in Fall 1984	Number of Students Enrolled	Still Active in Spring 1985	Still Active in Fall 1985	Still Active in Spring 1986
All First-Time Students	2,319	48%	26%	24%
Full-Time Students (12 or more units of credit)	397	70%	46%	42%
Part-Time Students (7-11.9 units of credit)	238	52%	31%	28%
Part-Time Students (.5 - 6.9 units of credit)	1,684	34%	21%	20%

As one might expect, the first-time full-time students had the highest college persistence rates from semester to semester, while the part-time students who enrolled in fewer than six units of coursework when they first entered the college had the lowest rate of persistence. It is instructive to note that for each of the groups appearing in Table 1 the greatest attrition took place in and between the students' first (Fall 1984) and second (Spring 1985) semesters at the college; the least occurred in and between the third (Fall 1985) and fourth (Spring 1986) semesters.

Persistence Rates of Day versus Evening Students

Comparisons of the college persistence rates from Fall 1984 to Spring 1986 for day and evening students are shown in Table 2. With one exception, the persistence rates from semester to semester among daytime students was substantially greater than those found among the evening students for both full-time and part-time students.

TABLE 2

College Persistence Rates of Daytime and Evening Students from Fall 1984 to Spring 1986

<u>Students Entering Napa Valley College in Fall 1984</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Still Enrolled in Spring 1985</u>	<u>Still Enrolled in Fall 1985</u>	<u>Still Enrolled in Spring 1986</u>
All Students	2,319	42%	26%	24%
Daytime	1,092	55%	35%	31%
Evening	1,227	33%	19%	28%
Full-Time Students	397	70%	46%	42%
Daytime	370	69%	47%	45%
Evening	27	78%	22%	18%
Part-Time Students	1,922	36%	22%	21%
Daytime	722	28%	28%	25%
Evening	1,200	19%	19%	18%

Changes in Enrollment Status (Full-time to Part-time and vice versa) from Semester to Semester)

What percentage of the students who entered Napa Valley College in Fall 1984 on a full-time basis (12 units of credit or more) remained full-time students in subsequent terms at the college? Conversely, what percentage of the students who entered the college in Fall 1984 on a part-time basis (fewer than 12 units of credit) became full-time enrollees in subsequent semesters? Answers to these questions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Change in Enrollment Status
of Students Who Entered Napa Valley College
for the First Time in Fall 1984

Students Entering Napa Valley College in Fall 1984	Number of Students	ENROLLMENT STATUS					
		Spring 1985		Fall 1985		Spring 1986	
		Full Time	Part Time	Full- Time	Part Time	Full- Time	Part Time
First-Time Students (12 or more units)	397	64%	36%	63%	37%	67%	33%
Part-Time Students (7 - 11.9 units)	238	23%	77%	36%	64%	52%	48%
Part-Time Students (.5 - 6.9 units)	1,684	2%	98%	8%	92%	10%	90%

Of those first-time, full-time freshmen who persisted at Napa Valley College in Spring 1985, 36 percent changed their enrollment status from full-time to part-time students. The most dramatic change in enrollment status was observed among the part-time students who entered the college taking 7 to 11.9 units of credit. Nearly one-half of the individuals in this group still enrolled in the college in spring 1986 had increased their course load from part-time to full-time status.

Fall 1984 Grades of Students Who didn't Re-enroll in the Following Semester (Spring 1985)

A sample of 286 college transcripts was examined for students who entered Napa Valley College in Fall 1984 but who didn't re-enroll in the following spring semester. Transcripts were analyzed for students who entered the college in Fall 1984 with fewer than nine college credits and who enrolled for eight or more units of credit as of the first census week. The 286 students in this sample were assigned to one of the three categories appearing in Table 4 according to the grades they received in the 1984 Fall semester.

TABLE 4

1984 Fall Semester Grades Received by Students
Who Entered Napa Valley College in Fall 1984
But did not Re-enroll in Spring Semester, 1985

Category	Number	Percentage
Received all Fs, Ws, and/or No Credit grades in the 1984 Fall Semester	149	55%
Dropped or failed one or more courses in Fall 1984 and withdrew from all classes in Spring 1985	59	22%
Completed some courses and dropped and/or failed other courses in Fall 1984	63	23%
TOTALS	271	100%

As illustrated in Table 4, 55 percent of the students who didn't re-enroll in the college in Spring 1985 received grades of F, W, and/or No Credit in all of the 1984 Fall Semester courses in which they were enrolled. An additional 22 percent of those in the sample who didn't re-enroll in the 1985 Spring Term received a mixture of passing and unsatisfactory grades (F, W, and/or No Credit) in the fall term.

The remaining 22 percent of the students in this sample failed and/or withdrew from one or more of their courses in Fall 1984 and then withdrew from all the classes in which they were enrolled in the 1985 Spring Semester. This finding, coupled with data collected in this study which revealed that 19 percent of the non-persisters entered the 1984 Fall Semester with unsatisfactory grades on their college transcripts, highlights the importance of prior grades in predicting student persistence at Napa Valley College.

CONCLUSION

During the past three years, the average daily attendance (ADA) generated from credit classes at the college has declined by about 10 percent. Much of this decline can be attributed to factors that are beyond the college's control. These factors include stricter enforcement of the course repetition policy, implementation of the enrollment fee and the drop fee, the \$30 million course hit list, improved job market which causes employers to hire students who might otherwise have attended college on a full-time basis, and a decline in the number of high school graduates. One factor that has an important bearing on enrollment which the college does have control over is retention of its students both within a given term and from semester to semester.

Stable enrollments ultimately depend on the retention of currently enrolled students as well as the steady inflow of new students. According to a recent Carnegie Council report, increased attrition--not recruitment difficulties--is the cause of enrollment problems among institutions that actually experienced enrollment declines during the past decade (Noel, 1985).

The findings of this study demonstrated that the decision of students to withdraw from the college took place during the first and, to a lesser extent, second semester, in which they were enrolled. This suggests that the retention plan developed by the college should focus on addressing the needs of first-year students. The results of this study also revealed that students who received unsatisfactory grades (F, W, and/or No Credit) in one term were likely to receive unsatisfactory grades in subsequent semesters at the college. Individuals with unsatisfactory grades in their first term at the college should be identified as "high-risk" students. Individuals in this category should meet with a counselor to develop a strategy to overcome the barriers impeding their success in college.

In the past few years the college has field-tested several approaches for increasing the retention rates of its students. These approaches have included mailing postcards to students who were absent from their classes, telephoning students doing poorly in their classes to encourage them to

seek needed assistance, and having counselors stay in close touch with a group of transfer-oriented students. The results of these efforts have been mixed. The major shortcoming of these attempts to reduce student attrition at the college was that they were done on a piecemeal basis rather than being part of a comprehensive institutional-wide strategy for increasing retention of students.

Strong consideration should be given to developing a college-wide student retention plan. Such a plan should be coordinated with the college's staff development program. An effective retention plan should result in a rise in the number of students who achieve their educational objectives and in an increase in college enrollment, especially in sophomore level classes.

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